

the  
union  
will die

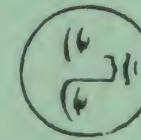
JOSEPH

○ RATHGEBER ○

My father has worked as a car mechanic for thirty-plus years. He unionized the shop in the '90s. The bosses stopped distributing turkeys at Christmas. *It was worth it*, he says.

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My father retires next month. I'm planning him a party, and I want to play Johnny Cash's song "Oney" as he arrives. As the song concludes, the first-person narrator—a factory worker—awaits the moment when he will pummel his ruthless boss, Oney. Cash, as the retiree, laughs maniacally as he summons him for the beating.



from now on I'm free to do what I desire.

I dedicate this song to the workin' man—

For every man that puts in eight or ten hard hours a day  
of work and toil and sweat.

Always got somebody lookin' down his neck  
tryin' to get more out of him  
than he really ought to have to put in.

The first thing my father ever  
taught me about work was to  
always be carrying a broom. *That*  
*way*, he said, *the bosses will assume*  
*you're doing something, and if they ask*  
*something of you, you can give the excuse*  
*you're on your way to do something else.*

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My father told me—and not  
long ago—that if someone  
ever desired to “go postal” at  
the shop, the window in the  
upstairs breakroom provides  
a perfect view of all the  
arriving employees. *You could*  
*just pick them off*, he said.

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Every mornin' Oney waited at the gate  
Where he'd rant and rave like I committed murder  
clockin' in five minutes late.

We clocked in and out on a greasy beige computer  
with a primitive interface. You had to enter a  
numerical code followed by your employee number.  
My father taught me to always clock in *before* you  
change into your work clothes and clock out *after* you  
change out of your work clothes. Those minutes add  
up over the years, but even the smallest wage theft is  
always worthwhile.

+

I once drove a customer's minivan into the side of a  
building, causing thousands of dollars in damage. The  
boss said he was going to garnish my wages until the  
debt was paid. My father went into the boss's office  
and told him I don't make enough money to pay such  
a debt. He told the boss it  
wasn't going to happen.  
He told him that's what he's got insurance for.

+



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will die  
“my father says  
when he retires.”

I've been workin', buildin' muscles—  
Oney's just been standin' 'round a-gettin' soft.  
And today about four thirty  
I'll make up for every good night's sleep I've lost.

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The roach coach pulled into the shop  
around ten o'clock every morning, honking  
“Shave and A Haircut” to announce his  
arrival. I got a six-pack of Hostess  
Donettes and a bottle of caffeine-free Diet  
Coke every day. My father put these on his  
tab. He never asked to be reimbursed.

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When I'm gone I'll be remembered  
as a workin' man who put his point across  
with a right hand full of knuckles  
'cause today I show Old Oney who's the boss.



The basement in my parents' house includes shelves  
fully stocked with c-fold paper towels, solar-powered  
battery chargers, and cans of brake clean. My father's  
been stealing these items for years. He plans to sell  
them on eBay.

I cannot speak for the rest—I am not of them, I do not frequently find myself in  
their company. They own companies. The people I associate with, sadly, work for  
companies. But among the working class, there is a tendency to refer to fellow  
manual or mental workers—whether on the job or off—as “boss.” A package  
might be delivered to your home. The deliveryman hands the box off to you, and  
you respond, “Thanks, boss.” You might come to an intersection on your  
commute, and a member of the construction crew in a fluorescent vest might wave  
you through the orange cones and heap of gravel. You'll roll down your window,  
gesture with your hand—maybe an approving nod—and shout, “Appreciate it,  
boss!” You might be walking down a city block with your child in an affluent  
neighborhood as a landscaping crew mows and edges and vegetative particulate  
fills the air. The landscaper—in his long sleeves and floppy, shade-rimmed hat—  
will pause to allow you to pass undisturbed. “Thanks, boss,” you'll say. Hishim,  
the gas station attendant, kisses my daughter's hand and gives her halal shop  
candies that he keeps in the booth below the motor oil display. He hands me the  
receipt for my fill-up, and I show my gratitude with *Thanka boss*. In a world of male  
bosses, it should come as no surprise that the use of *boss* in lieu of *pal*, *bro*, or *friend*  
is rigorously gendered. This is to say I've never heard a woman call a waitress  
“boss.” Is this habit paranozing, though? Is it condescension? Could it be  
perceived as a toying-with of the working class? It would certainly seem so if the  
one doing the “boss”-ing (if you will), is from the bossing class. In such a case, the  
term of endearment would function more of creating a false, imaginary world  
where the worker is imbued with power—a cruel joke due to its distance from  
reality. But can the “boss”-ing delivered from one proletarian to another not be  
considered an act of class subversion, of solidarity? Could it not be exercised as a  
hinting toward a restructuring of the world without bosses, so that the use of the  
term is nothing more than a relic, a memory of the world we once inhabited?

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He told him that's what he's got insurance for.

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Abolish publishing.



radical paper press

2019



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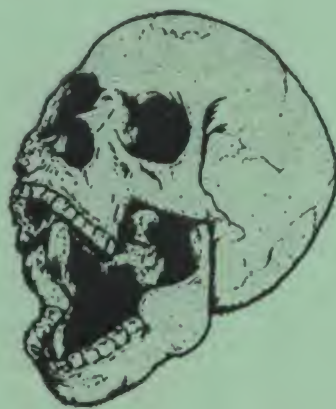
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